

'Tis the Season to be Jolly

(I wish!)

By Ezekiel Bozikis

I, like most people, have been doing my Christmas shopping. It was almost a matter of "blood, toil, tears and sweat". The traffic, the crowds, the prices! My nerves were almost shot.

Then there's the house and yard that need cleaning before Christmas. All this preparation! All this running around!

It's all well and good, but do we remember to prepare our souls? Some of us may observe the fast, but do we spend extra time in prayer?

You may think, "I've got no time!" And you would probably be right. Some people are so busy that they just haven't got time to do all the things that they feel need to be done. They usually end up full of stress and not pleasing themselves or anyone else.

What to do? Prioritize! Do what's truly important first, and if you have time do the rest. If not, don't worry about them. And, topping your list of priorities, should be God! Your time spent in prayer with Him, studying His Word, going to Church, keeping His commandments - these are indispensable for the well-being (perhaps even survival) of your soul.

You can't even use the excuse "my family takes all my time". You cannot be the best possible parent, or spouse, without Jesus Christ living in your heart - without His love and peace permeating your life, giving you the strength to carry your burdens. Thus, if you care about your family, you need to put Christ first in your life.

I think we all need to have a good look at the way we spend the Christmas Season. To borrow a couple of clichés: Do we remember the Christ in Christmas; and that "Jesus is the Reason for the Season"?

Remember, when the Magi came bearing gifts, the gifts were for Christ - not for each other.

The Christmas season is here again, and with it, the usual round of pre-Christmas activities. The stores and shopping centres are all decked out in lavish Christmas trees, bows, garlands and ornaments. Christmas carols are blaring everywhere. The adverts urge us to buy and keep buying.

Our social calendars are filled to overflowing. There are office parties, end of school parties. There is "schoolies week" and many organisations have Christmas carol nights. There is the Greek school concert and the Sunday school concert, not to mention the St. Nicholas Nursing Home seafood dinner, the ellikiomeni Christmas party, the Greek Community helpers party, and many other club and sporting parties.

Then, we have the social obligations. There are Christmas cards to send. Overseas ones have to go out first, and then the local ones. Parcels to send abroad, too. Once those are gone, we turn our attention to the Christmas presents we need for friends and family here. We will have something for everyone. We may not really like Uncle George, but he cannot be omitted. Convention says we have to remember everyone. So we spend endless hours searching for just the right gift. Then, we must have pretty Christmas paper, and matching ribbons.

When the presents are safely out of the way, we move on to the food. Christmas means food in a big way. The cooking of Christmas goodies takes lots of time, both in preparation and in running around shopping for ingredients. Naturally, we must have the best of everything, and plenty of drinks, too. We must have our Christmas "cheer".

So we are endlessly busy, right up until Christmas itself. We wear ourselves out preparing everything for our family and friends' enjoyment, and the Santa Clauses, red suited and jolly, encourage us in all our activity - ho, ho, ho.

But in all of this frenzied activity, we have forgotten one fundamental fact. Just what is Christmas about anyway? Why are we making all of this extra work for ourselves? Why are we giving presents to everyone? What is the cause of our celebration?

We are so caught up in society's version of Christmas, that we have completely lost sight of what it is about. We have lost the plot. We are heading in the wrong direction.

For Christmas is not about all this activity we are so busy with, nor is it about Jolly St. Nick and his herd of jolly reindeer. Christmas is the celebration of a birthday - of the most important birthday in the whole world. Christmas is the awesome mystery of God's love, so great for us that He chose to be born as a little Child for us and for our salvation - a birth that would end with His sacrificial death on the cross.

And if we are really celebrating His birth, why are we not doing what we usually do for the birthday of any one of our friends or family when they have a birthday. We give them a gift. Christmas is Christ's birth day. Where is the present we are giving Him?

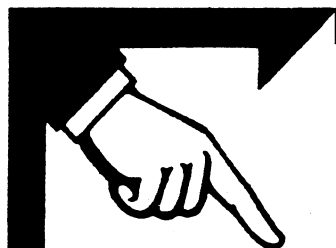
We probably have never considered that before. What would He like? What do you get for the One who has and is everything? Well, He left us some instructions

on the subject. "What ever you do for the least of these little ones, you do those things for Me", He said. When we clothe those who have nothing, feed the hungry, listen to the lonely, visit the sick, shelter the homeless, we do those things for Him.

In these troubled days, the possibilities are endless, the various relief organisations, overseas aid groups, Christmas Bowl, K Mart Christmas Tree, Australia Post present drive for farmers in drought stricken areas. We have only to open a paper or look at the evening news to find places to help others in need.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO GIVE CHRIST FOR CHRISTMAS?

What's Happening



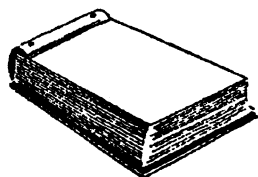
Orthodox Christian Youth Fellowship

Our youth fellowship will recommence Friday 13th January 7:30-9:30pm. This service is predominantly for high school age people and we welcome new members for 1995. From 27th - 30th December we will be organising day trips for OCYF members. Anyone interested in joining us please notify Helen on 849 3012 or Vas on 844 5834 as soon as possible.

Gold Coast, Water park, etc. are possibilities, so join us if you can. Many thanks to all the people who have contributed to the success of OCYF this year, in transport, group discussions and attendance. On behalf of our current youth leaders we wish all our youth and their families a blessed Christmas and New Year.

Helen Demitriou
(OCYF Coordinator)

Courses and Bible Study
are being planned for
1995. Watch this space
for more details.



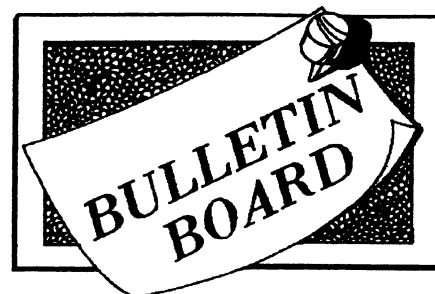
"WONDROUS IS GOD IN HIS SAINTS"

(Calendar of Feast Days)

25 Dec	Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ
26 Dec	Synaxis of the Theotokos (Flight into Egypt)
27 Dec	St Stephen - First Martyr
1 Jan	Circumcision of the Lord; St Basil the Great
3 Jan	St Ephraim
6 Jan	Theophany of our Lord (Baptism)
7 Jan	St John the Baptist
10 Jan	St Gregory of Nyssa
14 Jan	St Nina
17 Jan	St Anthony the Great
18 Jan	St Athanasios the Great
22 Jan	St Timothy - Apostle
25 Jan	St Gregory the Theologian



In Our Parish



CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS AND A HAPPY AND HOLY NEW YEAR

The year is slowly drawing to a close. With God's grace, we have been blessed with the continuation of our English Liturgy. The size of our congregation of a Saturday evening testifies to the need for these services for the spiritual lives of our parishioners. We are greatly indebted to Father Gregory and to all the priests who have made these services possible. Yet without a congregation there can be no Liturgy and without the Liturgy, it is easy for each of us to lose sight of God in our lives.

All of us on the English Liturgy Committee look forward to being able to continue to worship together. As the birth of our Saviour and Lord draws near, let us remember the words of the prayer in our Liturgy: "Let us love one another that with one mind we may confess. Father Son and Holy Spirit...". May God grant us all His love, peace and may the joy of His coming into the world be ours now and always.

God bless you and your families this Christmas and in 1995.

With Love in Christ,

English Liturgy Committee of St George.

THE GIFTS CHRIST HAS GIVEN US THROUGH HIS DEATH

(Taken from *The Way to the Kingdom of Heaven*, by St. Innocent of Alaska.)

Translated by Ezekiel Bozikis from the Greek translation of
Metropolitan Nikopoleos Meletios)

The first man was created "*in the image and likeness of God*". It was only because of this fact that he knew joy and blessedness. And he was only blessed until the moment when he himself destroyed the icon of God that was within him.

God has no end; He is eternal. Thus Adam was created to be immortal.

God is holy and righteous. And Adam was created sinless and righteous.

God is blessed. Adam, also, was created blessed. And his blessings would have increased each day through all the centuries!

Adam lived in Paradise; that is, a garden which God Himself had planted. There, Adam was content; and he was always healthy. He would never have known what sickness was! He would never have been afraid. All the animals would have obeyed him, as if he were their king. He wouldn't have experienced bad or uncomfortable weather. And though he worked in Paradise, to Adam it was recreation - gardening! The work would not have been physically demanding or stressful.

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In Paradise, Adam's heart and soul would have been full of the knowledge and love of God. Adam would have been always calm, peaceful and happy. He would never have known any distasteful situation, tragedies, or troubles of any kind. All of his desires would have been pure and right. His memory, his thoughts, and all of his mental attributes would have been perfect. And as a clean and pure creature, he would have been forever close to God. He would have talked with Him. God would have loved him like a much-loved child. In other words:

Adam would have been in Paradise, and Paradise would have been in Adam.

Thus, if Adam had not disobeyed his Creator, he would have been blessed and all of his descendants would also have been blessed forever.

But, Adam did sin. He disobeyed God's commandment even though it was simple and easy to keep. God then was forced to expel Adam from Paradise, because it is impossible for God to commune either with sin or sinners.

Thus, Adam immediately lost the happiness that he enjoyed in Paradise. His soul darkened. His thoughts and desires were debased. Instead of joy and peace, now he had sorrow, bitterness, wrath, poverty, hard labour, and all things distasteful. And, like a seal on all his woes, was Death! But, the worst thing of all was that, through this, the devil obtained dominion over mankind.

What, therefore, would have become of us, if Jesus Christ, through His compassion for us, had not redeemed us by His blood? Where would the human race be today without Him?

God loves us more than we love ourselves. By His great mercy He sent us His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. And Jesus Christ became human, like us in every way, except without sin.

Jesus Christ, by His Teachings, dispersed the darkness of ignorance and deception; and, with His Passion and Death, He removed our debt to God. And so, though we are slaves to sin and the devil, He has made us children of God.

Jesus Christ, by His Resurrection, broke down the gates of hell and opened wide the gates to Paradise, which had been closed to Adam after the Fall. Christ vanquished both Death and the devil. Thus, today, whoever dies in faith and hope in Christ, with their death they simply pass from life to LIFE! And Christ has given us weapons to defeat the devil, the Cross and Prayer.

Only by grace and the sacrifice of Christ can we step on the road that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven. Each one of us, if we desire it, can receive (without any obstacle or difficulty) the Holy Spirit, and to be filled by Him. Because, without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to walk the road that our Lord Jesus Christ walked.

If Jesus Christ had not come to earth, no one would ever have been able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.<-!> But now each and all of us have the capability. We can freely enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but if we follow the Way Christ took when He lived on earth.

And what has the Lord prepared for the faithful in Heaven?

Not only can't anyone describe these things, but they can't even imagine them! All we can say is that those who believe in Christ and keep His commandments will, after death, live with the angels, the righteous and the saints. There. In Heaven. And they will see God face to face. And they will rejoice - unadulterated joy, pure, continuous, eternal. There, there will be no sorrow, or tears, or mourning, or pain. And finally, at the end of the age, our souls will be reunited with our resurrected bodies, and we will reign with Christ forever.

All these good things Jesus Christ has made available to all people of all nations, without exception. Whoever wants to, can obtain them. Jesus has shown us the Way. He is ready to lead us by the hand along that Way. All we have to do is to hold out our hands to Him, cling firmly to Him, and do what He asks of us.

Do you see, therefore, how much Jesus Christ loves us and what good things He gives gives to us?

for the fact that Eustathios had found and was reunited with his family.

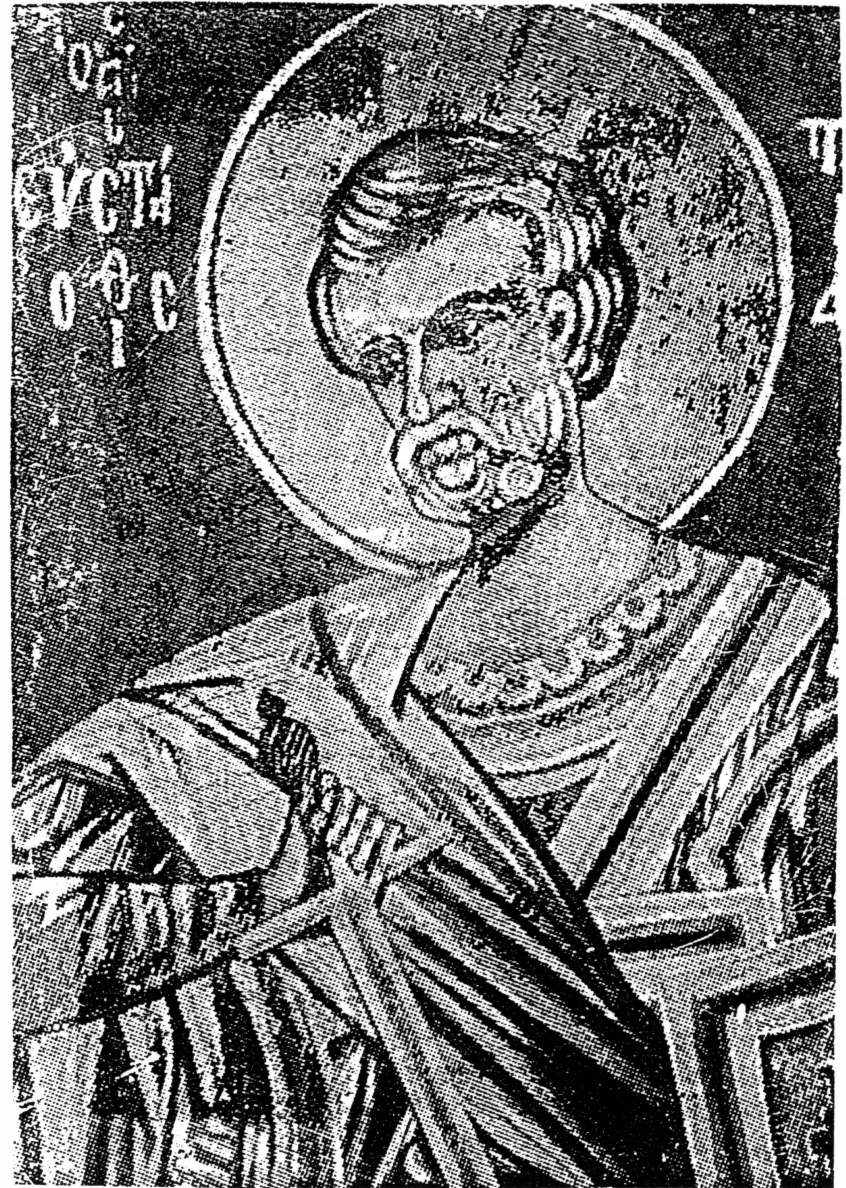
In the meantime, Traianos had died and his nephew Adrianos, who hated the Christians, had taken his place as Emperor. Upon hearing of General "Plakidas" return, he told him to make an offering to the gods in thanks for his victory. Eustathios refused, telling him with courage and true faith that he was a Christian. Adrianos stripped him of his uniform and threw him and his family into the arena but they were unharmed by the lions. He then had a large, hollow, copper bull heated until it was burning hot and had them put inside. Before this, however, the martyrs prayed to God for strength and requested that they be buried together.

After three days Adrianos opened the hollow bull and to his surprise he saw, that even though their spirits had ascended into heaven, they looked peaceful and unharmed. The Christians, taking advantage of the uproar and confusion, took their bodies and buried them together as they had requested.

During the rein of Saint Constantine, who protected the Christians, the faithful had built a church in their honour.

Every year our church celebrates their memory at 20 September.

The honouring of Saint Eustathios spread to the Byzantium, Rome, Venice and to the Parisians - to all of Christendom.



SAINT EUSTATHIOS

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(His memory is celebrated 20 September)

The martyr Eustathios lived during the torturous and horrifying years of Christianity, around 100 AD when Traianos and Adrianos ruled in Rome.

In the city, where Christian blood was shed daily, lived a distinguished General of the Roman army. His name was Plakidas. He was renowned for his strength and bravery, and was almost always successful in his campaigns. However, despite his position, he was wise and righteous and did whatever he could to relieve the pain and misfortune of the poor. His wife was a virtuous woman and their two sons had taken after their father.

God was observing Plakidas' generosity, benevolence - his irreproachable life - and was preparing a miraculous way to bring him close to Him - to the true faith.

To maintain their strength and fitness, Plakidas and his army frequently exercised by hunting wild animals. It was on a day like this that Plakidas saw a large deer and alerting his men they started chasing it. Slowly, one by one they abandoned the chase, but Plakidas persisted. Suddenly, seeing a ravine in the ground before him, he pulled his horse to an abrupt halt. Contrary to the deer, it was impossible for the horse to jump across. However, as Plakidas looked across to the calmly-standing deer he saw a vision. In between the deer's antlers was a glittering cross with the image of Christ on it. Shaken as he was by what he was witnessing, he heard a voice telling him to no longer live as a pagan but to believe in Him, the true God, and be baptised a Christian.

The next day, Plakidas and his family went to the church where the priest performed the Holy Sacrament. To Plakidas he gave the Christian name of Eustathios. His wife received the name Theopisti and his son's were named Agapios and Theopistos. Engulfed by the grace of God, Eustathios went and knelt at the place where he had seen the vision. Once again he heard the same voice, this time telling him that he would constantly be tempted by the devil into renouncing his faith - that he was going to face many trials. This was the last time Eustathios heard the divine voice.

It was not long afterwards that the trials of Saint Eustathios unfolded. There was an outbreak of Cholera and he lost all his servants and relatives. Before he could recover from this blow, he lost all of his livestock due to another disease. To ease the grief, he went with his family into the countryside but while they were away, their home was burgled which resulted in their poverty.

Deciding to leave Rome, they embarked on a ship heading for Egypt. The captain took a liking to Theopisti and blackmailing Eustathios he demanded a high price for the journey. Saint Eustathios' pleadings were useless - the captain threw him of the ship with his two sons at the first port of call. However, further despair was awaiting him. In an unknown place, father and sons walked for days, but as they tried to cross a fast-flowing river, Eustathios lost both of his sons. He couldn't find them anywhere. At first he contemplated taking his own life - he had lost everything. He realised, though, that this was a sin and prayed to God to give him the strength and courage to endure the pain. He was comforted by the thought that it was God's will to be subjected to all this grief and hardship. Walking for days he finally came to a city where he found a job to earn a living. It is said that he worked there for many years.

Meanwhile, Eustathios' sons were alive. During the incident while crossing the river, the two boys were separated. One was saved and raised by shepherds while the other was found and raised by farmers. They grew up separately and therefore were unfamiliar with one another. Eustathios' wife was also safe from her abductor - the captain had become very ill on the ship and died when he reached his homeland. Eustathios, though, was unaware of all this.

Time passed and the Roman Empire was being invaded by barbarians. The Emperor Traianos remembered the courageous General Plakidas, now called Eustathios, and living a peaceful and informal lifestyle. He sent massagers to look for him high and low. Finally Eustathios was located in Damaskas, and announcing to him the Emperor's command, he was outfitted with armour befitting a General.

Once in Rome, Eustathios recruited more men from all around the countryside to fight against the enemy of his homeland. Eustathios was unaware that among the recruited men were also his two sons.

Eustathios was victorious in his campaigns and many towns regained their freedom. The soldiers not only rejoiced for their victory but also